

House Bill 1051
FAV
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My name is Alice DiLaura. I am a concerned citizen and friend of Kyra Vocci, sister of Andrea. I write today in support of HB1051, Maternal Health-Assessments, Referrals and Reporting. (Maryland Maternal Health Act of 2024).

I support the screen initiatives of HB BILL1051. Prenatal and postpartum screenings that are spelled out in the bill would greatly help to support the mental health of new mothers, and hopefully catch postpartum states of mind that result in self-harm. According to the Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health, Maryland is among the top ten states for initiatives that support maternal mental health. Nevertheless, important gaps in support were reported. (Maryland Matters, “The United States is ‘failing mothers’ when it comes to maternal mental health: How is it in Maryland”. Danielle Brown, August 7, 2023)

Dr. Nilash Kalyanaraman, Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services, asserted in this article that Maryland needs more prenatal and postpartum risk screening to identify “mothers that need additional support”. This screening is exactly what this bill proposes.

Until the suicide of my friend’s sister, I was naively unaware of how fast and how deadly postpartum psychosis could be. I saw the social media picture of a smiling family, a beautiful baby and a content and happy mother that belied the reality of pain and self-harm that shockingly ended with her suicide. The scariest aspect is how fast the joy of birth can turn into a dark despair. Even with a supportive family and help, the mothers often lose their battle. Additional screening, in the beginning, end and post-partum timeframe might catch changes in mental health before tragedies occur. The screenings that this bill suggest will codify and support new mothers, an area that is greatly needed in Maryland. The records that will track the incidence of depression will also help document where needs exist.

Please consider this bill as an essential support for new mothers. There are many reasons why postpartum stress can develop into psychosis, and the least we can do as a state is support the mental health of mothers and our newest citizens.

Thank you for considering this testimony as you debate the proposed bill.